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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Roger Schank's and Robert Abelson's theory of scripts as a way of viewing learning as behavior at four hierarchical levels, the study examined the literacy learning behavior of two Chicano sisters (one in the second grade and the other in kindergarten) reading orally from storybooks in a home setting. The English story books received in the mail were among the first introductions of English literacy materials into the home by children. As the elder child read to her sister, mother, and an observer, she emulated a teacher's reading to children at school. Her enactment was marked by paralinguistic cues and vignette behavior appropriate to the teacher role. When she encountered words she could not pronounce, she would pause, step out of the teacher script, and ask the observer for help in pronouncing the words, thus enacting the theme of being a child at home in a family setting. During the reading episode, the little sister spontaneously began to copy and emulate her sister. Although important instances of learning were spotted, it was not concluded that such circumstances had a long term learning impact. The children had increasing problems at school. The self themes they developed did not manifest goals and plans that emphasized literacy. (NQA)

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Chicano Children's Literacy Learning at Home

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While it is clear that psychology has traditionally evidenced an insensitivity to learning in natural contexts it does not follow that anthropological accounts of learning ought to avoid cognitive accounts of learning in everyday settings. In this paper we take the position that emerging schema theory perspectives of cognition can be enriched enough to provide a useful and essential account of how it is that people acquire new skills and knowledge in everyday experience. An important key to this position is the idea that we need to locate learning not only in real world acts described as learning, but also in terms of learning as it fits into the intentions and themes of the "life space" of the learner. We will draw on Schank and Abelson's theory of scripts as a way of viewing learning as behavior at four hierarchical levels. The concrete example we will discuss concerns the literacy learning behavior of two Chicano children reading orally from storybooks in a home setting. Going beyond evidence of learning in the one oral reading session we observed, we discuss ways in which our target children's literacy learning and development rests on the longer term integration of literacy skills as meaningful components in their everyday lives.

Schank and Abelson's Theory of Scripts

Roger Schank--an artificial intelligence researcher--and Robert Abelson--a social psychologist--developed their theory of scripts as an information processing model of human cognition (Schank and Abelson, 1977). The theory was intended to allow the building of

computer models which could emulate peoples' comprehension of materials in stories. Schank and Abelson developed a skeletal psychological memory model of knowledge understanding in a person that included knowledge of what it means to be a person as a social entity. They needed such a memory model because explaining how people understand stories required a broad model accounting for story readers' understanding of the motivations and intentions of story characters. The Schank and Abelson model conceived of four kinds of major hierarchical memory units as depicting knowledge representations of "humanness". I will describe these units in a top-down fashion, i.e., going from the most general to the most specific kinds of knowledge that people have about people. The theory was originally not described in this direction--but it is easier to explain briefly in this way.

The THEME unit represents an enduring package of goals which characterize a person. A THEME corresponds to a set of behavioral

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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dispositions that a person manifests in a social situation. There are examples of three facets of THEMES, (role, interpersonal, and life) given in Figure 1. THEMES are essentially everyday social roles that people play. They differ according to the functions they serve in cultural routines, e.g., anthropologist vs. gas

station attendant, their interpersonal dependence, e.g., mother and child, and their longer term vs. shorter term realization, e.g., fourth-grader vs. highly-regarded anthropologist. GOALS are related to THEMES because enactment of a THEME requires that people behave purposefully, satisfying requirements of the roles that THEMES depict.

Agar has discussed a similar notion of a "theme" from a cognitive anthropology perspective and furthermore he has suggested the importance of theme in accounting for human interaction and language behavior. Later in this paper we will suggest that a cognitive anthropological understanding of literacy learning may require an understanding of how literacy fits into children's emerging THEMES--i.e., sociocultural roles.

In the Schank and Abelson theory THEMES are packages of GOALS. GOALS are of various types. Figure 2 lists and describes

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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seven major types of GOALS. THEMES are a realization of GOALS. For example, being a "smart and responsive" child in a classroom may be a realization of GOALS such as "answering questions posed by a teacher". "being cooperative in class", "doing neat work", etc. If you look at the list of GOALS given in Figure 2 you will see that some GOALS--e.g., biological satiation--are more pervasive than others. I will not here discuss differences in the nature of GOALS since it would be outside the main point of the paper. The main thing to appreciate is the notion that

script theory views behavior as hierarchical and inherently intentional--i.e., guided by GOALS. Achieving a certain form of literacy, or becoming literate more generally, may be viewed as goal-like. For example, attaining the THEME of "good first grader" may include attaining the GOAL of "achieving the literacy expected of a first grader in some schooling context." With children, one may conjecture that learning how to read and how to perform acts of reading has extended consequences for both social and cognitive development. Viewed in this way, learning how to read is more than learning how to perform isolated acts of reading; it becomes learning how to fulfill THEMES having GOALS requiring literate behavior.

Figure 3 describes PLANS. This type of knowledge unit consists of behavioral strategies that people follow in order to achieve GOALS. PLANS are abstractions; they are plots to achieve GOALS. PLANS are enacted by overt behavior often in the form of SCRIPTS.

Insert Figure 3 about here

SCRIPTS are stereotypical action sequences that people carry out in everyday life. They are the purposeful cultural units of action that are associated with identifiable activities that have a lot of

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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regularity in their conduct. Examples of SCRIPTS are eating at a McDonald's restaurant, attending a birthday party, reading a storybook to children, etc.

While not all behavior is script-like, much behavior is. SCRIPTS are associated with situations constraining how people are expected to interact with each other. They are very much at the interface between cultural knowledge and personal knowledge. This is so since they must account both for how individuals believe they should act in given situations and for how individuals expect others should act in the same situations. In a literate activity, such as oral reading of a story to children, the enactment of the activity involves scriptal behavior. The oral reader and audience must participate in the same event; they must negotiate and enact complementary roles and they must be in interactional synchrony throughout the event. When children learn to read orally they learn not only how to read but also how a reader and audience are expected to interact.

In the oral reading session at home that we will describe, we interpreted our children to be emulating a script for a teacher reading from a story book to children at school. The THEME of "acting like a child at home" was blended with playful emulation of the THEME of "acting like a teacher reading to children at school." The playful and affectionate ambience of the THEME of "child at home" allowed our children to practice being competent readers and to correct and attempt reading behaviors in a way that could not occur in the social structure of the school.

People's knowledge of a SCRIPT has internal structure. The constituents of SCRIPTS are depicted in Figure 4. The "name" of a SCRIPT

identifies its cultural activity type, while the "track" of a SCRIPT identifies the local, contextual version of the activity type. The props roles and functions of a SCRIPT identify the situation, social roles and purposes of an activity. The scenes of a SCRIPT are the major subevents that have to occur in order for a SCRIPT to occur as a complete unit. In the typical SCRIPT some scenes are required or expected to occur before others. Special status is given to the scenes that capture the beginning and ending of a SCRIPT. Before a SCRIPT can commence entry conditions must be met, and for a SCRIPT to end exit conditions must be met. Figure 4 gives examples of how SCRIPT components might be realized in an oral story reading situation at school. The examples given are relevant to the oral story we saw our children perform at home. Figure 4 also has some other information on SCRIPTS that we can't discuss now but which is relevant to understanding types of SCRIPTS. Let me just mention that SCRIPTS almost always involve something called VIGNETTES in enactment of their scenes. VIGNETTES are recognizable action routines that occur within scenes. VIGNETTES are subactions that occur as a scene is enacted. For example, in oral story reading the enactment of the scene of reading the body of a story is accompanied by VIGNETTES such as reading from the text pages, turning pages, showing children story pictures, etc.

Before going on to describe the learning of reading we observed in two children at home let me indicate that the units of knowledge of SCRIPT theory that I have described--i.e., THEMES, GOALS, PLANS and SCRIPTS need not be viewed as highly constrained in their structure

and interpretation. This is important to realize especially for SCRIPTS. Some SCRIPTS are indeed rituals; they are highly structured and prescriptive--e.g., attending a Catholic mass. Other SCRIPTS are not highly structured and may be enacted in ways that vary and in an order of scenes that is not tightly specified--e.g., doing someone a favor. It is important to make this point, since human behavior and interaction is very often improvisational rather than rotely enacted.

Another point to make about the improvisation of SCRIPT behavior is that its conduct may also embody behaviors which satisfy PLANS, GOALS, and THEMES that may interact with each other. People's style of communication, their paralinguistic cues, gestures, and manner of speech is often an embodiment of THEMES they realize--e.g., being intellectual and stuffy, humorous, excitable, etc.

I will now get to the learning of story reading we observed.

Our observations of learning to read at home

Three years ago Elsa Guerra and I began a longitudinal observation of four bilingual Chicano children's narrative behavior in home and school settings. We were interested in discovering ways in which the children's competence in enacting narratives, such as oral story reading would change and develop as children went from the second through fourth grade of a bilingual school program. Our observational approach and methods are described elsewhere (Duran and Guerra, 1981).

In beginning our study we had the fortunate experience of observing genuine learning of reading occurring in a home setting. The Lopez family (fictitious name) had just received some English storybooks in the mail. The books were part of an inexpensive mail order offer and had been sent to the family on a pay or return basis. The parents decided to keep the books. The parents of the children were both born in Mexico and of working class. The family migrated from Mexico within the past seven years and were minimally acculturated to life in the U.S. Spanish was the only language the parents spoke at home and the two children, Lili--in the second grade, and Pati--in kindergarten, spoke both Spanish and English at home. The family's receipt of English story books in the mail was one of the first introductions of English literacy materials into the home by children apart from Lili's homework textbooks.

After the Lopez family accepted the two mail order storybooks we set up a videotaping of the eldest child Lili's reading of the storybooks to her sister, mother and Elsa Guerra. The setting was the kitchen-dining room of a small apartment, with the children seated at the kitchen (dining) table. Elsa Guerra stood in the background near the mother as the latter listened and prepared a meal simultaneously.

As Lili proceeded to read from a storybook, her sister Pati sat attentively next to her--at least at the start. We observed that Lili in her reading was emulating a teacher's reading to children at school.

We later verified this by means of studying our classroom observation of the teacher and in discussions with the teacher who observed our tape.

Lili's enactment of the teacher's reading SCRIPT was marked by paralinguistic cues and VIGNETTE behavior appropriate to the role of teacher. Lili's intonation, stress and prosody in reading were carefully modulated, and melodic in character. She controlled these cues to emphasize important points in a story, and to contrast a shift from an omniscient story telling perspective to a quoting of story characters perspective. When she encountered a storybook picture Lili enacted a VIGNETTE involving the display of a picture to her audience. She would stop reading, lift the book over her head with the picture facing the audience, and she would simultaneously make an announcement such as, "Look at the pretty picture."

Lili's enactment of the teacher story reading SCRIPT represented learning. It was learning because she was improvising and transferring knowledge of a school-based literacy SCRIPT into a novel literacy event in a nome setting where reading of English literacy materials did not occur. It was learning and not simulation since Lila was not copying someone else's behavior she observed. There was no teacher present at home during reading. Lili was relying on a mental model she had for how oral reading to children occurs in a school setting. Lili's participation in oral reading at school had not only taught her how to be a child-listener, she had also learned how to enact the role of teacher reading.

Lili demonstrated a second kind of learning as she read. When she encountered words she could not pronounce she would pause, step out of the teacher SCRIPT, and ask Elsa Guerra for help in pronouncing the words. The THEME of being a child at home in a family setting was then enacted. In asking for help while playing the role of child at home, Lili was doing something acceptable in a home setting. This behavior would not have been sanctioned at school and, furthermore, the social and cultural ambience of interaction would not have been as "loving" at school as at home. Lili's behavior demonstrated to us that she could learn to read English at home under the right circumstances and that learning to read at home might be more effective in some ways and on some occasions than learning to read at school.

During the reading episode we observed, Pati, Lili's sister, spontaneously began to copy and emulate her sister's reading. Pati did not know how to read, but she picked up her own story book and began to describe concocted actions depicted by storybook pictures. At one point she lifted her book over her head and displayed a picture to her audience. Pati was not merely copying her sister because she performed her reading SCRIPT on a different schedule from her sister's reading. We saw Pati learning from her sister what oral story reading was about. The warm ambience of the home setting allowed Pati to learn some of the rudiments of oral story reading. While Pati's utterances were not very coherent--for example, there was no developed story line--she nonetheless was

clearly trying to give the impression that the pseudostory she was telling originated in the printed words and pictures of the book. She was thus learning some of the critical attentive behavior which children must master before they can learn to read. Furthermore, she was learning about the sequence of SCENES and VIGNETTES that accompany story reading as a whole improvisational activity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Three years experience with the children we have described leads us to conclude that while we may spot important instances of learning, we cannot conclude that such circumstances have a long term learning impact. Indeed, the children we have described have had increasing problems at school. Lili, by the time of the fourth grade, has begun to show poor socialization at school. She is less interested in school and she was viewed by her last teacher as uncooperative and not especially bright. Lili still reads well but her reading skills have not picked up as quickly as they might have. Lili's home environment has not changed much since we began our study. There are still virtually no literacy materials in either English or Spanish at home. Reading has not become a very critical behavior fulfilling Lili's GOALS and PLANS for her self development.

Lili's sister Pati has also encountered her share of problems. Pati failed the first grade. Her teacher felt she was not yet

mature enough to benefit from school. She has a speech impediment (a lisp) which has not responded to speech therapy and she has some trouble with her schoolwork. Pati does not read well. She manifests problems in decoding of words. Until this past school year when she was in the second grade she did not have many opportunities to learn about reading as a whole and purposeful activity.

We believe that the situation of the two children we have described indicates the importance of viewing learning as long term endeavor rather than as just a short term endeavor. The objective of locating learning in everyday life is admirable; it certainly goes beyond locating learning in the psychological laboratory. But just as the psychologist in the laboratory may be short-sighted, so may the anthropologist be shortsighted if attention is only given to isolated learning incidents. Learning is also located in people's long-term lives. The script theory notion of THEME seems useful as a way of thinking about the importance of learning skills in the context of the life span of individuals in a culture and society. In the case of the children we have observed, we believe that the self THEMES they are developing do not manifest GOALS and PLANS that give a lot of emphasis to literacy. Based on our observations, we know that our children have more potential for literacy learning than they have exercised. In some way, their everyday cultural and social lives have not reinforced the importance of reading as a skill central to their personal development. Based on

our longterm interactions with their family and school it seems reasonable to suggest that one impediment has been the children's inability to exercise literacy skills in a home and community setting. If reading had been more important in the home, this might have stimulated children's further transfer of literary materials across home, community, and school settings. In turn, this enhanced permeability of literacy materials across settings could have led the children to find an even more significant role for reading in their personal development.

Our discussion of script theory seems to suggest that if literacy learning is to be enhanced in children, it must find a space not only in sociocultural environments but also in children's conceptions of themselves.

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Figure 1

SCHANK AND ABELSON: HIERARCHY OF KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES

THEME: Enduring characteristics of a person that describe his/her major orientation in life, THEMES are packages of GOALS that a person tries to satisfy. THEMES are realized by satisfying goals that signify accomplishments of activities relevant to a THEME.

Some Types of THEMES:

THEMES can involve

1) roles (e.g., anthropologist, gas station attendant)

2) interpersonal dependence in carrying out roles (e.g., mother, child, story reader)

3) life or very long term roles (e.g., highly regarded anthropologist, raconteur extraordinaire)

Purpose

THEMES help us account for purposive behavior in the life span of an individual and they allow us to make predictions about future-oriented behavior and GOALS that a person seeks to fulfill

Embodiment

Set of test-action pairs (productions) where the test is a defined social situation, and the action is the generation of one or more GOALS which in turn generate some PLANS and eventually some physical world actions.

Figure 2

GOAL: Realization of a component of a THEME. GOALS are everyday objectives that a person tries to fulfill or approach fulfilling through behavior. GOALS may be immediately realized or realized in the long term. Some GOALS may occur because they help fulfill other GOALS. PLANS serve the purpose of organizing GOALS and behavior to fulfill other GOALS. GOALS vary in their abstractness and their relation to corporal vs. mental situations.

Types of GOALS:

1) S: Satisfaction Goals--A recurring strong biological need which when satisfied, becomes extinguished for a time, e.g., S - Hunger, S - Sex.

2) E: Enjoyment Goals--An activity which is optionally pursued for enjoyment or relaxation, e.g., E - Travel, E - Sex.

3) A: Achievement Goals--The realization, often over a long term, of some valued acquisition or social position, e.g., A - Skill, A - Good Job.

4) P: Preservation Goals--Preserving or improving the health, safety, or good condition of people, position, or property.

5) C: Crisis Goals--A special class of P-Goals set up to handle serious and imminent threats to valued persons and objects.

6) I: Instrumental Goals--Any goal which, when achieved, realizes a precondition in the pursuit of another goal, but does not in and of itself produce satisfaction.

7) D: Delta Goals--Similar to an instrument goal except that general planning operations instead of scripts are involved in its pursuit.

Figure 3

PLAN: A series of projected actions or subGOALS to realize a single GOAL. PLANS give rise to behavior aimed at satisfying subGOALS and GOALS. The actions that satisfy PLANS can be organized in terms of SCRIPTS (stereotypical action routines) or in terms of other behavior that is not stereotypical.

PLANS are general and abstract. They help explain how multiple behaviors are coordinated to achieve GOALS.

In ascertaining the GOALS driving fulfillment of PLANS GOALS may be decomposed into one or more I-GOALS and D-GOALS

where I-GOALS are simple instrumental goals

and D-GOALS are goals, e.g., D-Cont: gain control goal

e.g., D-Know: acquisition of knowledge goal

A PLAN includes a list of actions that will yield state changes and the preconditions for those actions along with guidelines for choosing among actions.

Example of a PLAN: Attain the GOAL of reading a story to an audience at home by following a SCRIPT for story reading adopted from school. Also carry out other behavior in story reading that helps accomplish the GOAL of story reading and that also satisfies the GOALS characterizing the THEME child at home with family.

Figure 4

SCRIPTS: Stereotypical action sequences satisfying GOALS comprising PLANS; they are situation specific. SCRIPTS are the recognizable units of everyday behavior; they are usually based on sociocultural conventions for carrying out an activity.

Examples of SCRIPTS:
- Reading a fairy tale to children
- Attending a wedding
- Doing someone a favor
- Eating at a McDonald's restaurant
- Participating in a children's birthday party

SCRIPTS vary in their generality. Enactment of some SCRIPTS may resemble more enactment of a PLAN than enactment of a fixed order of actions.

SCRIPT structure

SCRIPT name: e.g., oral story reading

Track: version of script — e.g., teaching reading to children at school

Props: $object_1$, $object_2$ — e.g., storybook

Roles: $role_1$, $role_2$ — e.g., teacher-reader, pupil-listener(s)

Functions: f_1, f_2 — e.g., read from storybook, listen to story

Entry conditions: motive predicates on actors — e.g., reader wants to read, sits silently, holding storybook, gazes attentively at children; children want to listen, they look at reader

Results: predicates on actors — e.g., reader closes storybook, announces "the end"

SCRIPT broken down into scenes (and then into VIGNETTES)
e.g., start of story, body of story, ending sequence